

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 847 of 2023

Monday, this the 29th day of January, 2024

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, Member (J)
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)”**

No. 653763-G Junior Warrant Officer (Retd)

Subhash Chandra Mishra

R/o Vill – Shivgarh (Lal das), PO – Darchhut (Deokali),

Taluk – Magraura, Distt – Pratapgarh (UP) - 230405

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant: **Shri Keshav Sharma**, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, South Block, New Delhi – 110011.
2. The Chief of Air Staff, Air Headquarters, Vayu Bhawan, New Delhi – 110106.
3. The Directorate of Air Veterans, Air Headquarters, Subroto Park, New Delhi – 110010.
4. The PCDA (Pension), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad.
5. The JCDA (Air Force), Subroto Park, New Delhi – 110010.

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the
Respondents

: **Shri R.C. Shukla**, Advocate
Central Govt. Standing Counsel

ORDER

1. The instant Original Application has been filed under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007 for the following reliefs :-

- (a) *Declare the disabilities* (i) *PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (OLD)* (ii) *DM TYPE-II* (iii)

POSTERIOR CIRCULATION STROKE (SMALL PONTINE INFRACT) as aggravated by the military service.

- (b) To pass an order or direction commanding the respondent to grant the benefits disability pension from the next date of discharge i.e. 01 Aug 2019 @ 75% per annum along with interest @ 12% per annum till the actual realization of aforesaid amount.*
- (c) To issue/pass any other orders/direction to respondents to grant the benefits of rounding of the disability pension up to 75% for life in terms of Govt. of India letter dated 31 Jan 2001 and various judgment of Apex Court as well as this Hon'ble Tribunal.*
- (d) To issue/pass any other orders/direction as this Hon'ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper under the circumstances of the case in favour of the applicant and render justice.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 24.06.1980 and was discharged on 31.07.2019 in Low Medical Category on attaining the age of superannuation after rendering more than 39 years of service. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Bamrauli on 15.04.2019 assessed his disabilities (i) 'Primary Hypertension (Old)' @ 30% for life and (ii) 'Diabetes Mellitus Type-II' @ 20% for life and considered both the disabilities as neither attributable to nor aggravated by AF service, (iii) 'Posterior Circulation Stroke' @ 20% for life and considered it as attributable to AF service. Accordingly applicant was sanctioned with disability element @

20% for life vide Corr. PPO dated 28.07.2020. However, applicant has not been granted benefit of disability element for disabilities, (i) Primary Hypertension and (ii) DM Type-II being NANA. The applicant submitted 1st appeal on 12.12.2022 for grant of disability element for all three disabilities but the same has not yet been replied/decided by the respondents. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

3. Learned Counsel for the applicant pleaded that at the time of enrolment, the applicant was found mentally and physically fit for service in the Air Force and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of enrolment in Air Force. The diseases of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence all disabilities are attributable to and aggravated by Air Force Service. He placed reliance on the judgment of the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Dharamvir Singh vs. Union of India & Others** (Civil appeal No. 4949 of 2013), decided on 02.07.2013 and pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability pension in similar cases, as such the applicant be granted disability element and its rounding off to 75% for life for all three disabilities.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents submitted that applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 24.06.1980 and was discharged on 31.07.2019 in Low Medical Category on attaining the age of superannuation after rendering

more than 39 years of service. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) assessed his disabilities (i) 'Primary Hypertension (Old)' @ 30% for life and (ii) 'Diabetes Mellitus Type-II' @ 20% for life and considered both the disabilities as neither attributable to nor aggravated by AF service and third disability, 'Posterior Circulation Stroke' was assessed @ 20% for life and recommended it as attributable to AF service. Accordingly, applicant was sanctioned with disability element @ 20% vide Corr. PPO dated 28.07.2020. However, applicant has not been granted benefit of disability element for disabilities, (i) Primary Hypertension and (ii) DM Type-II being NANA. He further submitted that first and second disabilities of the applicant have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence, as per Rule 153 of Pension Regulations for the Air Force, 1961 (Part-1), applicant is not entitled to disability element of pension for both the disabilities. He pleaded for dismissal of the Original Application.

5. We have heard Ld. Counsel for the applicant as also Ld. Counsel for the respondents. We have also gone through the Release Medical Board proceedings as well as the records and we find that the questions which need to be answered are of two folds:-

- (a) Whether the disability of the applicant is attributable to or aggravated by Air Force Service?

(b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the disability pension?

6. The law on attributability of a disability has already been settled by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Dharamvir Singh Versus Union of India & Others***, reported in (2013) 7 Supreme Court Cases 316. In this case the Apex Court took note of the provisions of the Pensions Regulations, Entitlement Rules and the General Rules of Guidance to Medical Officers to sum up the legal position emerging from the same in the following words.

"29.1. Disability pension to be granted to an individual who is invalided from service on account of a disability which is attributable to or aggravated by military service in non-battle casualty and is assessed at 20% or over. The question whether a disability is attributable to or aggravated by military service to be determined under the Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982 of Appendix II (Regulation 173).

29.2. A member is to be presumed in sound physical and mental condition upon entering service if there is no note or record at the time of entrance. In the event of his subsequently being discharged from service on medical grounds any deterioration in his health is to be presumed due to service [Rule 5 read with Rule 14(b)].

29.3. The onus of proof is not on the claimant (employee), the corollary is that onus of proof that the condition for non-entitlement is with the employer. A claimant has a right to derive benefit of any reasonable doubt and is entitled for pensionary benefit more liberally (Rule 9).

29.4. If a disease is accepted to have been as having arisen in service, it must also be established that the conditions of military service determined or contributed to the onset of the disease and that the conditions were due to the circumstances of duty in military service [Rule 14(c)]. [pic]

29.5. If no note of any disability or disease was made at the time of individual's acceptance for military service, a disease which has led to an individual's discharge or death will be deemed to have arisen in service [Rule 14(b)].

29.6. If medical opinion holds that the disease could not have been detected on medical examination prior to the acceptance

for service and that disease will not be deemed to have arisen during service, the Medical Board is required to state the reasons [Rule 14(b)]; and 29.7. It is mandatory for the Medical Board to follow the guidelines laid down in Chapter II of the Guide to Medical Officers (Military Pensions), 2002 - "Entitlement: General Principles", including Paras 7, 8 and 9 as referred to above (para 27)."

7. In view of the settled position of law on attributability, we find that the RMB has denied attributability for first and second disability by endorsing that both the disabilities 'Primary Hypertension (Old)' and 'Diabetes Mellitus Type-II' are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service being a life style related disorder and onset of disabilities in peace station, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability element of pension. However, considering the facts and circumstances of the case, we are of the opinion that this reasoning of Release Medical Board for denying disability pension to applicant for both the disabilities is not convincing and doesn't reflect the complete truth on the matter. Peace Stations have their own pressure of rigorous Air Force training and associated stress and strain of Air Force service. The applicant was enrolled in Indian Air Force on 24.06.1980 and both the disabilities have started after more than 30 years of Air Force service i.e. in the year 2010 and 2013 respectively. We are therefore of the considered opinion that the benefit of doubt in these circumstances should be given to the applicant in view of ***Dharamvir Singh vs Union of India & Ors*** (supra), and both the disabilities of the applicant, 'Primary Hypertension (Old)' and 'Diabetes Mellitus Type-II' should be considered as aggravated by Air Force service.

8. The law on the point of rounding off of disability pension is no more RES INTEGRA in view of Hon'ble Supreme Court judgment in the case of ***Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & ors*** (Civil appeal No 418 of 2012 decided on 10th December 2014). In this Judgment the Hon'ble Apex Court nodded in disapproval of the policy of the Government of India in granting the benefit of rounding off of disability pension only to the personnel who have been invalided out of service and denying the same to the personnel who have retired on attaining the age of superannuation or on completion of their tenure of engagement. The relevant portion of the decision is excerpted below:-

“4. By the present set of appeals, the appellant (s) raise the question, whether or not, an individual, who has retired on attaining the age of superannuation or on completion of his tenure of engagement, if found to be suffering from some disability which is attributable to or aggravated by the military service, is entitled to be granted the benefit of rounding off of disability pension. The appellant(s) herein would contend that, on the basis of Circular No 1(2)/97/D (Pen-C) issued by the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, dated 31.01.2001, the aforesaid benefit is made available only to an Armed Forces Personnel who is invalidated out of service, and not to any other category of Armed Forces Personnel mentioned hereinabove.

5. We have heard Learned Counsel for the parties to the lis.

6. We do not see any error in the impugned judgment (s) and order(s) and therefore, all the appeals which pertain to the concept of rounding off of the disability pension are dismissed, with no order as to costs.

7. The dismissal of these matters will be taken note of by the High Courts as well as by the Tribunals in granting appropriate relief to the pensioners before them, if any, who are getting or are entitled to the disability pension.

8. This Court grants six weeks' time from today to the appellant(s) to comply with the orders and directions passed by us.”

9. It is also observed that claim for pension is based on continuing wrong and relief can be granted if such continuing wrong creates a continuing source of injury. In the case of **Shiv Dass vs. Union of India**, reported in 2007 (3) SLR 445, Hon'ble Apex Court has observed:

"In the case of pension the cause of action actually continues from month to month. That, however, cannot be a ground to overlook delay in filing the petition. It would depend upon the fact of each case. If petition is filed beyond a reasonable period say three years normally the Court would reject the same or restrict the relief which could be granted to a reasonable period of about three years. The High Court did not examine whether on merit appellant had a case. If on merits it would have found that there was no scope for interference, it would have dismissed the writ petition on that score alone."

10. In the present case, applicant is already in receipt of disability element of pension for third disability, 'Posterior Circulation Stroke' @ 20% for life from the next date of discharge from service, i.e. w.e.f. 01.08.2019. Therefore, applicant is eligible for complete 60% disability element of pension for all three disabilities as assessed by RMB @ composite 60% for life which would stand rounded off to 75% for life in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of **Shiv Dass** (supra) and **Ram Avtar** (supra). Hence, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability element of pension @ 60% for life to be rounded off to 75% for life may be extended to the applicant from three preceding years from the date of filing of the Original Application.

11. In view of the above, the Original Application deserves to be allowed, hence **allowed**. The impugned orders rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension

for balance two disabilities are set aside. The disabilities of the applicant are held as aggravated by Air Force Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @60% for life which would be rounded off to 75% for life from three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. Since the applicant is already in receipt of disability element @ 20% for life for third disability from the next date of discharge from service, therefore, the respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @60% for life which would stand rounded off to 75% for life from three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application after adjusting the amount of third disability being paid to the applicant. The date of filing of the Original Application is 18.07.2023. The respondents are further directed to give effect to this order within a period of four months from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order. Default will invite interest @ 8% per annum till the actual payment..

12. No order as to costs.

13. Misc. Application(s), pending if any, shall stand disposed off.

14. Ld. Counsel for the respondents orally submitted to grant Leave to Appeal against the above order which we have considered and no point of law of general public importance being involved in the case the plea is rejected.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 29th January, 2024
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